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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BELGRADE 000565

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STATE FOR U/S BURNS, A/S FRIED, DAS DICARLO

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TAGS: UNSC PBTS PREL SR

SUBJECT: UNSC Visit to Belgrade

Classified by Ambassador Michael Polt, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

Summary

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¶1. (c) The April 26 Security Council Mission (SCM) to Belgrade produced little new substance on the Kosovo status issue, but was spun by PM Kostunica as an endorsement of the re-start of negotiations. The GoS passed to SCM members its "new proposal" for an alternative solution to the status issue, which was nothing more than a re-hash of unacceptable Serbian proposals dating back more than a year. A few of the more unprepared SCM members, notably the South African PermRep, made unhelpful statements about alternative solutions and disparaging Ahtisaari, but the summary press statement by the Belgian PermRep hit all the right marks, emphasizing that the process would continue to be focused in New York. Ambassador Khalilzad believes the likely impact on hearts and minds in the UNSC from this trip will be negligible. End summary.

Kostunica Pushes "New Plan"

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¶2. (c) Kostunica provided little new in the way of substance in his presentation to the SCM: he stressed the territorial integrity issue, noted the need to respect the UN Charter, and commented on the inadvisability of creating a second Albanian state in Europe. He did admit to the SCM that negotiations had taken place over the past 14 months - something he has previously been unwilling to admit even in private - but stressed that they ended in deadlock, and that as a result, the Ahtisaari proposal could not be seen as a result of compromise or agreement by either side. He emphasized both in the meeting and later to the press that this SCM represented the re-starting of negotiations on the Kosovo status issue. The GoS also handed over to the delegation a three-page "status proposal," ostensibly a new Serbian plan but really nothing more than a re-hashed presentation of previously rejected proposals - essentially autonomy in a demilitarized Kosovo that would not control its own foreign policy or defense and whose stability would be guaranteed by the international community for the next twenty years (faxed to desk).

Tadic Takes Hard Line

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¶3. (c) In comparison to Kostunica's workman-like performance, Tadic played the heavy in what appeared to many in the SCM to be an overly-orchestrated "bad cop-worse cop" routine. Tadic took a hard line of never accepting any form of independence for Kosovo under any name. He talked of Serbia's status as a founding member of the UN, and noted the historical links making Kosovo an issue of identity for Serbia. He did not, however, raise partition (nor did it come up elsewhere). In his formal press remarks, the Belgian PermRep barely touched on the Tadic meeting, focusing most of his attention on Kostunica's presentations.

Lunch With NGO's

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¶4. (c) Lunch at the Belgian Ambassador's residence with civil society leaders was a portrait in contrast to the official meetings. Virtually all the attendees said that most Serbs recognize that Kosovo will be independent, noting that the political leadership in Serbia is making more of an issue of it than it merits, due to their need to use Kosovo to hold onto political power. This obsession by the leadership, they said, forces an upswing in popular attention given to the issue, which in turn restricts the political maneuvering room for the leaders - a self-fulfilling prophecy. Civil society leaders said that a status resolution could be made palatable, noting that it would succeed best if (a) worded carefully; (b) accompanied by broad international support (i.e., US and EU unity); and (c) if possible, not publicly driven by the U.S. or other players seen as "anti-Serb."

Parliamentarians' Meeting

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¶5. (c) Representatives of virtually all the political parties that will participate in the next parliament were represented at the meeting (the notable exception being Riza Halimi, the only Albanian MP in the Serbian parliament). Almost unanimously, the parties rejected independence as an outcome, noting their need to uphold the recently passed Serbian constitution, which claims Kosovo unequivocally as an integral part of Serbia. The lone dissent came from a representative of the democratic opposition, who said the Kosovo independence issue is not a major concern, and that entrenched Serbian leadership is inflating the crisis because it suits their political and economic interests. He said those who are obsessing on Kosovo do not want Serbia to change - sparking a spirited fight with SRS leader Toma Nikolic, who professed that Serbia didn't need to be

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in the EU, doesn't want to join countries that have bombed Serbia, and vowing that, no matter how long it took, Serbia would reclaim Kosovo. Other MP's interceded, reaffirmed Serbia's desire to move toward Europe, but noted that the international community should not link movement toward Euro-Atlantic integration with acceptance of Kosovo's independence. On the margins of the meeting, representatives from both G-17 Plus and DS approached Ambassador Khalilzad privately to assure him that they could live with an independence outcome (even if they could not say so), and that robust EU engagement and additional U.S. support for returns would help the process go more smoothly.

Press

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¶6. (c) Press followed the events throughout the day, with wire services picking up Kostunica's initial comments about the re-starting of negotiations. Press also picked up on a question posed by Ambassador Khalilzad, who asked Kostunica what Serbia, as a country governed by the rule of law, would do in reaction to a UNSC Resolution that created the conditions for Kosovo to declare independence. Kostunica refused to answer the question, noting that such a hypothetical outcome in the UNSC would be impossible. At the end of the day, the Belgian PermRep held a short press conference outlining the "interesting day" the SCM had had. His remarks hit all the right notes - reminding the press that the visit would end with a meeting with Ahtisaari, emphasizing that this was an informational mission and that the locus of decision making would remain in New York, and noting (including in response to several questions about which Kosovo enclaves weren't on the agenda) that the intention of the SCM was to provide a balanced view of the situation on the ground. He also highlighted Kostunica's assurances that Serbia is committed to a solution that is not violent and does not threaten violence.

Comment

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¶7. (c) Kostunica clearly pushed this SCM visit to maximum local

effect to try to convince Serbs (and perhaps himself) that this visit represents the re-starting of Kosovo status negotiations. It did not help particularly that many of the non-permanent UNSC members seemed to be very poorly prepared for the meetings and clearly had at best a passing familiarity with the Ahtisaari plan, leading to some uninformed questions that might fuel an impression among the Serbian leadership that there is wiggle room for a new negotiating track. Nevertheless, Ambassador Khalilzad told us he is confident that this trip has done nothing to change hearts and minds in the UNSC. We will report more reactions and the local UN office readout of the visit in our 4/27 Kosovo roundup.

**¶ 8. (u) Ambassador Khalilzad did not have the opportunity to clear this message.**

POLT